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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS : Mrs. Orlando Letelier
Robert S. Steven, Political Officer, Santiago
John B. Tipton, Political Officer, Santiago

DATE & PLACE : Tuesday, May 21, 1974 - 0900 - Letelier Apartment
at Ismael Valdés Vergara 348

SUBJECT : Orlando Letelier

DISTRIBUTION : AMB/DCM, POL, ARA/BC

Nurielдин Hermosilla, a conservative attorney who has been defending FACH personnel in the current series of trials and who is Orlando Letelier's lawyer, called Steven late on the afternoon of May 20 to ask for an "urgent" appointment. He came to the Steven home about 8:00 PM the same evening to discuss what he had been told by Mrs. Letelier and Fabiola Letelier, Orlando's sister, about their visit to see Orlando in FACH custody on Saturday, May 18.

Hermosilla said that Letelier and the rest of the Dawson Island prisoners had been tortured and badly maltreated. The Letelier women had found Orlando in shocking condition, with a great weight loss and showing signs of severe emotional stress. The prisoners were convinced that they would be tortured again, and that harsh sentences would be imposed after trial. Hermosilla wanted an approach by the American Ambassador to the GOC in an effort to prevent further torture and to improve the treatment of the prisoners. He noted that he was lunching May 21 with Ramsey Clark and William Booth of the American committee concerned with political prisoners in Chile (the Morray group). Steven said that he would convey this information to his Ambassador, and that he would communicate with Mrs. Letelier.

After Hermosilla's departure, Steven arranged by telephone to call on Mrs. Letelier at 9:00 AM May 21. (As the Letelier's telephone is known to be monitored, the call was made through, and the visit arranged in the name of, the Stevens' son who is a frequent guest in the Letelier home.) Steven also arranged to be accompanied by Tipton, to have two views of the conversations as a check.

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Mrs. Letelier received Steven and Tipton in her apartment near downtown Santiago. She acknowledged that she knew of Hermosilla's visit the previous evening to Steven. She also said that she was "not supposed to talk" but that she felt she had to make her story known where it might do some good (i.e. the American Embassy).

Orlando Letelier is at present being held at the Chilean Air Force Academy on the eastern outskirts of Santiago, with some seven other former officials and leaders of the Allende Government who have recently been brought up from Dawson Island. The FACH has been allowing one family per day to see a prisoner, and the Leteliers were the last to visit. Other families have been allowed visits of about 20 minutes, with only two people in the room with the prisoner at one time. Mrs. Letelier had called Air Force Colonel Oteiza, who apparently is the officer in charge of all Air Force detainee matters, to beg for permission to bring Letelier's parents to see him as well. After considerable hesitation, Oteiza finally arranged for a total of ten family members to visit, and for all to see the prisoner at the same time. During the visit, at 9:00 PM, an Air Force Lieutenant was present, and the Air Force served coffee and cookies.

Mrs. Letelier said that she was shocked at Letelier's appearance and manner. She had last seen him in January in Punta Arenas, at which time he appeared to be in good health and mental state. But now he is gaunt, haggard, staring, and obviously emotionally disturbed. He told her that the last month to month-and-one-half on Dawson Island (the prisoners were transferred to Santiago about May 8) were "hell" and that the prisoners were badly mistreated. He used the (Spanish) word "torture" several times. She added, perhaps significantly, that the Dawson camp commander had been changed just prior to this period. She was told that the prisoners had been deprived of sleep, given bad food in small quantity which was often thrown on the ground before them, underwent forced marches during which they were made to fall to the ground, and were denied mail. According to Letelier, they were subjected to every degrading treatment possible. He was highly agitated because of his conviction that they were to be tortured again, here in Santiago. He expects that he and the other prominent prisoners will be given 10-year sentences after trial. Asking his wife to get help,

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he spoke several times of appealing to Sol Linowitz to come and get him out. (Mrs. Letelier said that Letelier and Linowitz were good friends.)

Mrs. Letelier was so taken aback by his changed manner and appearance, and the information which contradicted everything which she had known up to that point, that she tried to assure her husband that he must be wrong and that she was sure that he and the others would be well treated and could hope for leniency in their trials. But Letelier reiterated his fears in strong terms.

While Mrs. Letelier talked to the guard in an effort to distract him, Letelier's sister Fabiola talked further with him. Letelier told Fabiola that he and others had been tortured with "electric current."

In talks with other families of the detainees, Mrs. Letelier has been told of five who gave essentially the same information, and who show signs of maltreatment. She noted that a significant number of those who did not claim that they had been tortured are older men who have wives 10 to 15 years younger. She speculated that these men may have had a more protective feeling toward their wives and did not share the same confidence in their strength as those husbands of a more equal age with their wives.

It is her understanding that no further visits are scheduled, but she will appeal for more visits and has hopes that they will be granted.

Mrs. Letelier said that during the visit with her husband and in conversations with the families of other detainees, she had learned that the Dawson Island prisoners were split into four groups (one for each service) upon arrival in Santiago. At the Air Force Academy are Letelier, Miguel Lawner, Luis Matte, Miguel Muñoz, Arturo Jirón, Jorge Tapia, Jaime Concha, and Pedro Felipe Ramirez. The Carabineros have their prisoners "at a place somewhere up in the mountains;" in this group are inter alia Anselmo Sule, Hugo Miranda, Camilo Salvo, Anibal Palma, and Daniel Vergara. The Navy has its prisoners in Puchuncaví near Quintero, while the Army has its group spread among various barracks in the Santiago area. The Navy, she said, is apparently treating their prisoners the best and has found things for them to do, such as tending vegetable gardens. Apparently, however, there has been no mistreatment

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of persons in any of the four groups since their arrival from Dawson, but there is a common expectation that there soon will be. She noted that the Air Force was the last service to allow families' visits. She also stated that the Dawson prisoners expect to be reunited in one group somewhere "in June," although no one seemed to know why.

She confirmed that she would join Hermosilla for lunch with Ramsey Clark and William Booth of the Committee for Fair Trial of Chilean Political Prisoners May 21 and that the lunch would take place in the Letelier apartment. Mrs. Letelier also planned to call on Colonel Oteiza later in the morning, to thank him for arranging the visit with her husband and to ask him to allow a doctor to see Orlando and to provide him with tranquilizers. In neither case, she said, did she plan to raise the question of torture or other mistreatment, claiming that any public denunciation at this point would probably be counter-productive. She did specifically ask that Ambassador Popper be informed of the situation and that he quietly intercede with the GOC authorities on behalf of the prisoners.

In other comments, Mrs. Letelier said that her husband and Aniceto Rodriguez were life-long friends and that Letelier's appointment as Ambassador to the United States, over the objections of Altamirano and others, "was the only favor" that Rodriguez successfully obtained from Allende. Rodriguez told her shortly before leaving Chile (he plans to settle in Venezuela, she said) that both Santiago garrison commander General Sergio Arellano and Economy Minister Fernando Leniz had argued (to whom is not clear) for placing Letelier under house arrest, but that this request was vetoed by the Navy, an action she attributed to lingering resentment over Defense Minister Letelier's adamant opposition to Admiral Montero's resignation before the coup. She commented that apparently both Arellano and the Air Force are trying to make up for their hard-line image by being nice now. She noted that Admiral Merino had cordially received Letelier's mother last week and told her not to worry, and that General Leigh had also spoken kind words about Letelier. She added that the military had dropped off at her apartment at 10:00 PM one night recently a suitcase containing a number of Letelier's possessions while on Dawson. She showed us a guitar signed by most of the Dawson prisoners, a rather battered tin drinking cup, and a worn pair of heavy work gloves (his fifth pair, she said).

POL/RSSSteven:JBTipton:dh
Cleared: POL/DNArzac

Approved: DCM/HBThompson
The Ambassador

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